

Salt River Fire Department Operating Guidelines

Protecting our People

April 2000

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We are no longer immune from violent attacks by the people in our community we are trying to help.

Violence is widespread and can occur on virtually every call we respond to. Anytime alcohol is involved we may find people out of control. Gang violence is a concern as drugs and crime adds to violent acts in our community. In all of these cases, firefighters may be called upon to treat and help victims.

The first priority in arriving at the scene is to provide a protected environment for firefighters to work in. If the call is described as one in which violence has occurred and you are not yet staged, stage according to violent incident procedures, as indicated. Firefighters could be surprised by the scene which becomes violent when they initially were safe. At any time, what looks like a routine call can turn into a deadly encounter. A patient or bystander could pull a gun, a knife, or a crowd could surge towards firefighters.

The following guidelines will describe how to secure the scene before action is taken.

Scene Security:

- String fire line tape to provide an established barrier between firefighters and the crowd. Fire line tape is a good divider. It provides a control line for PD to enforce. The tape is generally received well by citizens as needed by emergency personnel to provide control of an incident. Fire line tape should also be considered to divide large crowds and allow police to maintain control.
- Call the Police to secure traffic and crowds. This is the primary responsibility of police at the scene of a fire department emergency. When police arrive, a fire department member should establish liaison with the on-scene ranking police officer. Explain to them what is needed to control the scene; more officers should be called if necessary.
- Provide for lighting when indicated. A utility truck and spotlight take away the cover of night. More serious violence occurs after daylight hours. All emergency responders will be able to see more of the scene when good lighting is provided.

Size-up

- While responding to the scene all members of the crew should consider the violence potential of the type call they're responding to. In all cases violence involving firefighters is possible.

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Given the type of the call, Alarm will automatically contact PD for support. Depending on the type of call, PD may already be responding and actually be first on the scene.

A shooting, stabbing, fighting (domestic or public) should be a red flag for more violence. A man down, suicide, and overdose must be closely evaluated for potential violence. Gang violence will receive automatic PD dispatch. Do not hesitate to call for PD if you believe something about the call is potentially violent.

Size-up starts as soon as you receive the call. Initial and follow-up information available from alarm can be important. (In most cases, PD will be on the scene prior to our arrival and may have Fire stage when the scene is still dangerous or unstable.)

What to look for:

- PD on the scene.
- Nature of the call.
- Type of injuries.
- Drugs/alcohol/altered level of consciousness.
- Is the fight still in progress?
- How many units responding (establish staging)?
- 1. Is the person still on the scene that caused the injuries?
- How many people are involved?

Parties should be a red flag for dispatching PD. Upon PD arrival, make contact with the ranking police officer and describe what security is needed.

Public Perception is not always positive. Some people may fear detection of criminal activity and do not respect our profession or us. They may have caused the injury such as a domestic or gang confrontation.

They may not want the patient to receive emergency care.

Some dangers signs:

- Antagonism towards us.
- Verbal abuse.
- Lack of cooperation.
- Even as passive and cooperative they may still be a threat.

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When dealing with customers with an altered level of consciousness as a result from alcohol/drugs or mental illness, we need to introduce ourselves as firefighters, and that we are here for them and ask what we can do to help.

Uniforms sometimes can be threatening to certain people. They may confuse us with the police or may not like any authoritative type figure. To prevent confusion about who we are, introduce yourself as a firefighter, as soon as possible.

Always be aware that a weapon may be on a person or near by and out of sight. Train yourself to look for them; between car seats, waistbands, jackets, and loose clothing.

Spotting the apparatus (Residence):

- Turn off siren several blocks away if possible.
- Drive by slowly and pass the house.
- Spot the vehicle approximately 100 feet past the residence or 100 feet before. This will allow us to approach the scene from a safe position (direction).

Approaching the building:

- Do not slam door of apparatus or vehicle.
- Keep volume low on radio.
- Gain information before entering house.
- Look and listen before entering house.
- Listen for arguments or fights/number of voices you hear.

Apartment buildings:

- Keep the elevator door on manual so it will remain open.
- Check stairwell doors to make sure they are unlocked to provide an escape route.

Contact and control:

- The contact stands on the door knob side of the door. This will require the person opening the door to open it wide to see you.
- If there is a screen or security door, position yourself on the door knob side of the inner door. Be subtle and non-aggressive in positioning yourself. Greet the homeowner with a friendly demeanor.
- **NEVER STAND DIRECTLY IN FRONT OF THE DOOR.**

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Entering the structure:

- Introduce yourself.
- Dog (hold down doorknob) ask for dog to be secured.
- If they ask you to come in, ask them to open the door.
- If they insist, ask them why they can't come to the door.
- Consider the risks involved when looking into a window.
- Scan room for weapons, alcohol, drugs, and signs of violence.
- Look for signs of weapons (bulges in their clothing, watch their hands).
- Keep crew in sight at all times. Never leave a crewmember alone.
- Have at least two crewmembers together at all times.
- Have the person who answered the door lead you to the patient.

Separating disputants:

- Injuries from domestic disputes are reported as accidents (falls, etc.)
- Don't stand between disputants
- Separate disputants by taking them to an area where they can't see or hear one another (at least two crewmembers should be together); separating them will help calm the situation.

Spotting the apparatus and approaching a vehicle:

- Park unit to the rear of the vehicle (a full length from vehicle).
- Slight angle to driver's side protection barrier from traffic.
- Use safety cones where necessary.
- Use safety vests.

Interviewing stance:

- If you suspect violence, stand at a partial right angle out of arms reach (they must turn to attack you).
- Don't stand against a wall.
- Don't fold arms (judgement).
- Don't put hands in pockets (appear unconcerned).

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1. Use physical barriers (coffee table, chair, etc.) between yourself and a potential violent person.
1. Move people away from makeshift weapons.
If you see a weapon, call PD, retreat to a safe area.

DO

Pay attention to any information provided by Alarm.

Have one of the portable radios tuned to PD (if you have the capability).

Once on the scene, be aware of your surroundings and impending danger.

When approaching the scene and while on-scene, display a confident/in-control attitude ("Command presence").

Always look for the informal or designated leader of a potentially violent group and attempt to visually monitor and, if possible, make a personal contact to ease tensions.

Clear the scene of potentially violent materials.

Set up fire line tape to help secure perimeter.

DON'T

Get lulled into a false sense of complacency (we've been here 10 times before attitude).

Ignore the potential for violence on any call we go to including travel to and from the call and trips back and forth to the apparatus while on-scene.

Ignore your gut feeling when it doesn't feel right, it probably isn't.

Be confrontational be confident, but not abusive to anyone or any group.

Be an easy target call for assistance early and be prepared to bail when the need arises (don't be a dead hero).

These guidelines will aid you and your crewmembers from potentially violent situations. Your best tools will be your good common sense and awareness.